



COPD and Tobacco Use

Fact Sheet

The single most important thing that you can do for your health and the health of others is to quit using tobacco.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a disease of the lungs. A person with COPD has trouble breathing caused by partially reversible airway obstruction. Over time, the airways of those suffering from COPD become permanently obstructed or blocked. When this occurs, the person gradually loses their ability to function because they cannot take enough air into their lungs.

COPD may be called by other names, such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis. As the disease progresses, it has a profound impact on the quality of patients' lives. Lung function may decline to the point where regular daily activities such as walking and dressing are extremely difficult.

COPD can have several causes.

- Cigarette smoke – The most common cause of COPD is tobacco smoke. COPD can happen in people who smoke now, and sometimes in people who have smoked in the past. People exposed to secondhand smoke are also at risk for COPD.
- Air pollutants – Chemicals, dust, fumes and secondhand smoke are examples of air pollutants that can cause COPD if a person breathes them in over a long period of time. People may be exposed to these pollutants either at home or at work.
- Genetic factors – In some people, COPD can be caused by a condition called alpha-1-antitrypsin (AAT) deficiency that they have inherited. In people with AAT deficiency, a protein that helps protect the lungs is not produced. AAT deficiency is not a common cause of COPD.

Symptoms of COPD:

- Chronic coughing
- Shortness of breath, especially when doing activities of daily living
- Phlegm (mucoous) production
- Wheezing
- Frequent lung infections
- Reduced ability to do daily activities
- A barrel-shaped chest
- Fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss

If you are at risk for COPD:

- Talk to your doctor if you are concerned about your risk for COPD.
- Stay away from air pollutants
- Quit Smoking – To date, smoking cessation remains the most effective way to reduce the risk of COPD and slow its progression. For more information about tobacco cessation, call Quit Now Kentucky at 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669) or log on to QuitNowKentucky.org. It is a free service. You can also contact the tobacco coordinator at your local health department for programs near you.